

Carnegie Corporation of New York Quarterly

The Arts of the United States

A few months ago the office of the Mayor of San Francisco received a telephone call from a young man who inquired politely if the Mayor happened to have an extra helicopter which he would care to lend for a few hours. It was all for a good cause, the young man assured the Mayor's presumably startled secretary; he, the young man, was a photographer working on the Carnegie survey of the arts of the United States, the most comprehensive survey and collection of visual materials for the teaching of American arts ever made. He had already photographed objects in the de Young Museum; he had snapped the Opera House from two angles; he had caught a cable car being reversed on its turntable. Now there were a few shots for which he simply must be air-borne. The Mayor's office was cooperative, and from a borrowed helicopter, with a rented aerial camera, the photographer took some breathtaking views of Baghdad-by-the-Bay.

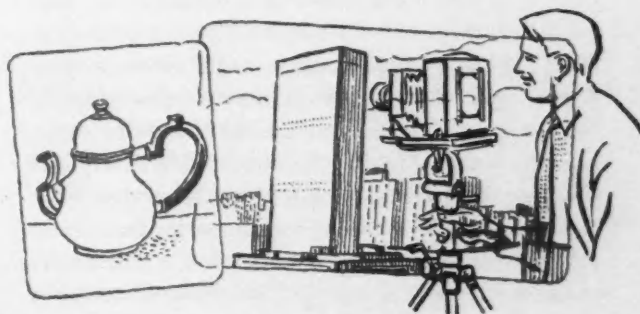
The young man is one of four photographers who for the past year or so have ranged the country over, carrying their cameras into museums, homes, Indian cliff-dwellings, factories, and even, in one case, into jail. (The photographer in question did not go there to photograph anything but because he was taken there by the police.) But to start the story here is to start it in the middle.

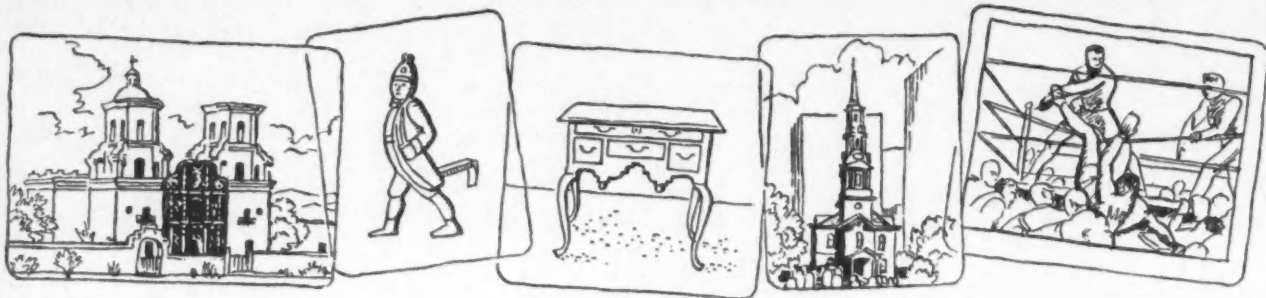
Several years ago, Carnegie Corporation made a sizable grant to the University of Georgia for a project to be under the leadership of Lamar Dodd, head of the University's art department. The object was to provide the best possible collection of high-quality

color slides to be used in teaching about the arts of the United States.

The idea was not to provide slides merely for the teaching of art itself, but slides which would help to illustrate American cultural and social and intellectual history. This meant that the collection must not be restricted to painting, sculpture, and architecture, but must cover other forms of art, with that word taken in its broadest meaning. It must include graphic arts, and posters, and interiors, and stage design, and photography. The collection must be comprehensive but selective; not so gigantic as to be prohibitively expensive, yet broad enough so that, taken as a whole, it would represent a kind of documentary of American life.

The selection of the objects to be included was only the first of several steps in the project. Mr. Dodd and a committee of experts eventually decided upon 18 different categories, and a specialist in each of the art periods or media developed a list of objects which he thought should be photographed for the collection. After considerable pruning of lists, about 4,000 objects were agreed upon.





Running down the lists is in itself a short course in American history. Even without seeing the color slides, images spring to mind, stirring up memories of nearly forgotten classrooms and textbooks and teachers, recalling periods of history dimly learned. Take, for instance, this item: "Radiator, cast iron, black finish, with statue of Temperance, 1820-30." Or, under architecture: "Capitol, Richmond, Virginia (2 views). Architect: Thomas Jefferson." And under city design is the simple entry: "Jamestown, Virginia." What a distance in time and technology from the village of the first settlers to the Quonset hut communities which sprang up almost over night during World War II to accommodate shipyard and aircraft workers.

A social life now dead comes alive as one reads "Whatnot, rosewood, mid-19th Century," and "Wallpaper, red moire, 1890-1900," and "Wedding Cake House, Kennebunkport, Maine." Recent events too are brought to mind. There are posters from both World Wars: "Sure! We'll finish the job!" from 1918, and the ominous "Someone Talked" from 1942. These are included in the category covering visual communications, along with James Thurber's famous cartoon "Well, who made the magic go out of our marriage, you or me?" and record album covers, and advertisements. In the same category is a brochure cover bearing the grisly claim: "A triumph in metallurgy and prosthetic beauty."

Despite the introduction of such pieces of Americana, the bulk of the collection is, of course, in painting, sculpture, and architecture. Each of these categories includes the accepted "musts," although even here it is probable that no two persons' choices would be identical. Many of these classics have been photographed before, but few were available in slides so faithful to the original works of art. In certain fields, however, notably the art of the American Indian and that of the Spanish-Americans of the Southwest, many materials are included which have not been

given wide, or in some cases any, distribution for teaching purposes. And the color slides of folk art and stage design represent a substantially new contribution to teaching materials.

After identifying the objects to be photographed, the next step was to get them photographed. Sandak, Inc., of New York City was finally chosen to produce the finished slides. A number of reproduction laboratories were considered, but Sandak got the assignment primarily because it was already experimenting with a new process, and would not be satisfied with anything less than the best slides it was humanly and technically possible to get. Sandak, Inc. eventually selected four photographers and sent them out across the country, each armed with about 100 pounds of equipment—a camera with three lenses, lighting equipment, a tripod, reflectors and screens, and fabrics and papers for backgrounds. Each carried his own tool chest with 50 or 60 items, so that minor repairs could be made en route.

To Document—Not Glorify

None of the cameramen was a "specialist" in this or that kind of photography—house-and-garden or sculpture or bridges—because he had to be able to handle photography in every category. One photographer covered 40,000 miles in a Volkswagen microbus, going into 47 of the then 48 states, and photographing objects as different in size and shape as an Indian ring and the United Nations building. He shot Frank Lloyd Wright houses and Indian cliff-dwellings (not so different as you might think), small carvings made by mound-dwellers, tombstones, cigar store Indians, pewter pitchers, California missions, pieces of jewelry, and of course numerous paintings and pieces of sculpture.

Throughout, the photographers bore carefully in mind that their object was not to glorify but to document; not to make "pretty" pictures but accurate ones—in short, that they were making pictures for



teaching purposes, to show students how things actually are. If a building had an architectural flaw, the photographer didn't try to hide it behind a branch of a tree. This refusal to make "mood" pictures which would show buildings in their best or most glamorous light worked hardship in some cases on both photographers and architects. One distinguished architect followed the photographer doing his buildings for three days, and so intently that on the third day he walked smack into one of his own glass walls.

So far as the records show, only one photographer ran into trouble with the law. He was assigned to photograph an old mansion in Philadelphia, and the evening before he was to take the pictures decided to "case the joint." Having arrived in the extremely prosperous neighborhood of the mansion, he asked directions of several passers-by, including one policeman. The directions were apparently sound, for he had arrived at the house and was "looking the place over," as he put it, or "lurking in the bushes," as the police put it, when he was placed under surveillance by a covey of Philadelphia's finest. The next day he was picked up by the F.B.I. After the placing of several telephone calls and the production of identifying documents which proved he was not a house-breaker, he was released.

While the photographers were pursuing their adventures and misadventures, the Sandak office in New York was struggling with, and finally surmounting, problems which have long plagued the makers of color slides. The first was how to devise a process by which an unlimited number of duplicates of high quality, or high fidelity, could be made. Ordinarily, to make a duplicate, the original positive color transparency is rephotographed. This usually produces a "duplicate" which is not an exact duplicate, because its color qualities are seldom faithful to the original positive, and therefore even less faithful to the object which was originally photographed. After much ex-

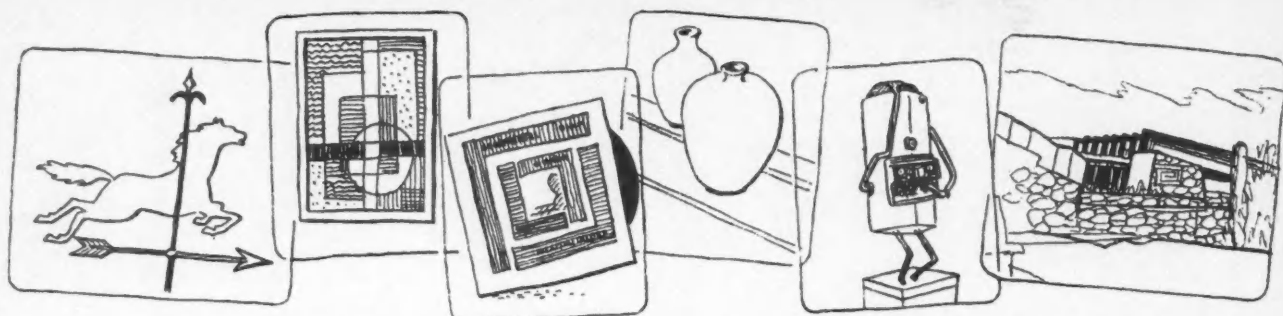
perimentation, Sandak decided that it was best to use a system by which color negatives are made of the objects with the use of electronic flash equipment. Included in the area photographed are the engravers' "gray scale" and "color patch," and these are used as guides when reproductions are made. In other words, the final commitment as to color and density is now made in the laboratory, not "on location," because the scales indicate the proper color balance. With this system, Sandak is now able to make, from the original negatives, an unlimited number of high quality original positives.

Mass Producing Finished Slides

Next on the list of problems was to find a mass production method for mounting the slides. The whole idea of the project was to provide sets of slides to be used in colleges, universities, libraries, and museums, and these institutions might consider the accomplishment something less than glorious if they were presented with several thousand naked color transparencies. Until now, slides have had to be mounted by hand, at the rate of about 20 per hour if the mounter were fairly dextrous, and thousands of youngsters working their way through college can testify that the job is exacting but not exciting.

Now all the work that had to be done so laboriously by hand is done by a newly designed machine, at the rate of about 2,000 slides per hour. The machine receives the roll of film, cleans it and the glass between which it will be mounted, cuts the film, and places it in the proper position between the two sections of glass. Meantime, a printing press within the machine is printing complete documentation on the heat-resistant, high-impact, plastic mount. Finally, the machine fits the mount around the transparency.

One feature which will please art teachers is that the frames which surround paintings are blacked out before the film is mounted. This is desirable because in general teachers prefer that students see paintings



without the distraction of frames which may or may not be of the type in which the artist would have wished his work to appear. So another time-consuming process—that of pasting black tape over the frames—has been eliminated by the new system.

The development of the Sandak systems of reproduction and mounting may make a significant contribution to the whole field of color slide production. It has now been proved that it is possible to make faithful reproductions in quantity, to package them so that they are both well-protected and highly convenient to use, and to do all this at a reasonable cost.

The fundamental purpose of the project nevertheless remains: to provide sets of slides suitable for teaching purposes. From the 4,000 slides, Lamar Dodd's committee* selected 2,500, covering all the 18 categories, which might be most useful in art and history or civilization courses. From the 2,500, it also chose 1,500 to comprise a collection more suitable for small institutions. For experimental purposes, Carnegie offered 15 free sets—ten of the larger, five of the smaller—to certain colleges, universities, museums, a public school system, a public library, and two high schools. These institutions will make careful record of the use of the sets, so that their teaching value can be assessed and possible revisions suggested. In addition, the Carnegie trustees have appropriated funds for subsidizing purchase of the sets by selected four-year colleges and universities, and libraries and museums. The full cost of the sets is \$3,000 for the larger and \$1,800 for the smaller. A number of subsidies—which are on a 50-50 basis—have already been made, and future applications will be considered by the Corporation. All 4,000 of the slides are, of course,

available for purchase from Sandak, 4 East 48th Street, New York City.

The first shipments of the slides will be made this spring, and within the year a large catalog, containing black and white photographs and descriptions of all the objects, will be published. Included in the catalog will be essays on each of the 18 categories, written by the specialists who made the original selections.

In such categories as painting and sculpture and architecture it has been common practice among most institutions to use slides or photographs or prints for teaching art. But such materials are seldom available for portraying a civilization in its broadest sense—the highways and byways, the technology as well as the arts, the flavor of a culture.

The written word will correctly remain the primary medium for relating the history of cultures and civilizations. But its message can be made more powerful through the use of photographs. Properly used, color slides such as those in this collection can help to bring alive courses in many subjects in addition to art. The scores of men and women who spent several hectic years working on this project will feel amply repaid if they do.

The projects described in this issue of the QUARTERLY fall in the category of "American Studies," a field in which the Corporation had a strong interest several years ago. Although this area does not now form a major part of the Corporation's program, in the years from 1949 to 1955 nine Carnegie grants went to colleges and universities for teaching programs in American civilization, several research projects were supported, and the American Studies Association received aid for its activities. The art survey, the folklore recordings, and the oral history project which are the subjects of this QUARTERLY cannot be neatly pigeonholed, but they formed an important and lively part of the Corporation's efforts to increase understanding of American civilization.

* William Pierson, Professor of Art, Williams College, Executive Secretary

Martha Davidson, Coordinating Editor

Lloyd Goodrich, Director, Whitney Museum of American Art

Oliver Larkin, Professor of Art, Smith College

Tremaine McDowell, Chairman, American Studies, University of Minnesota

